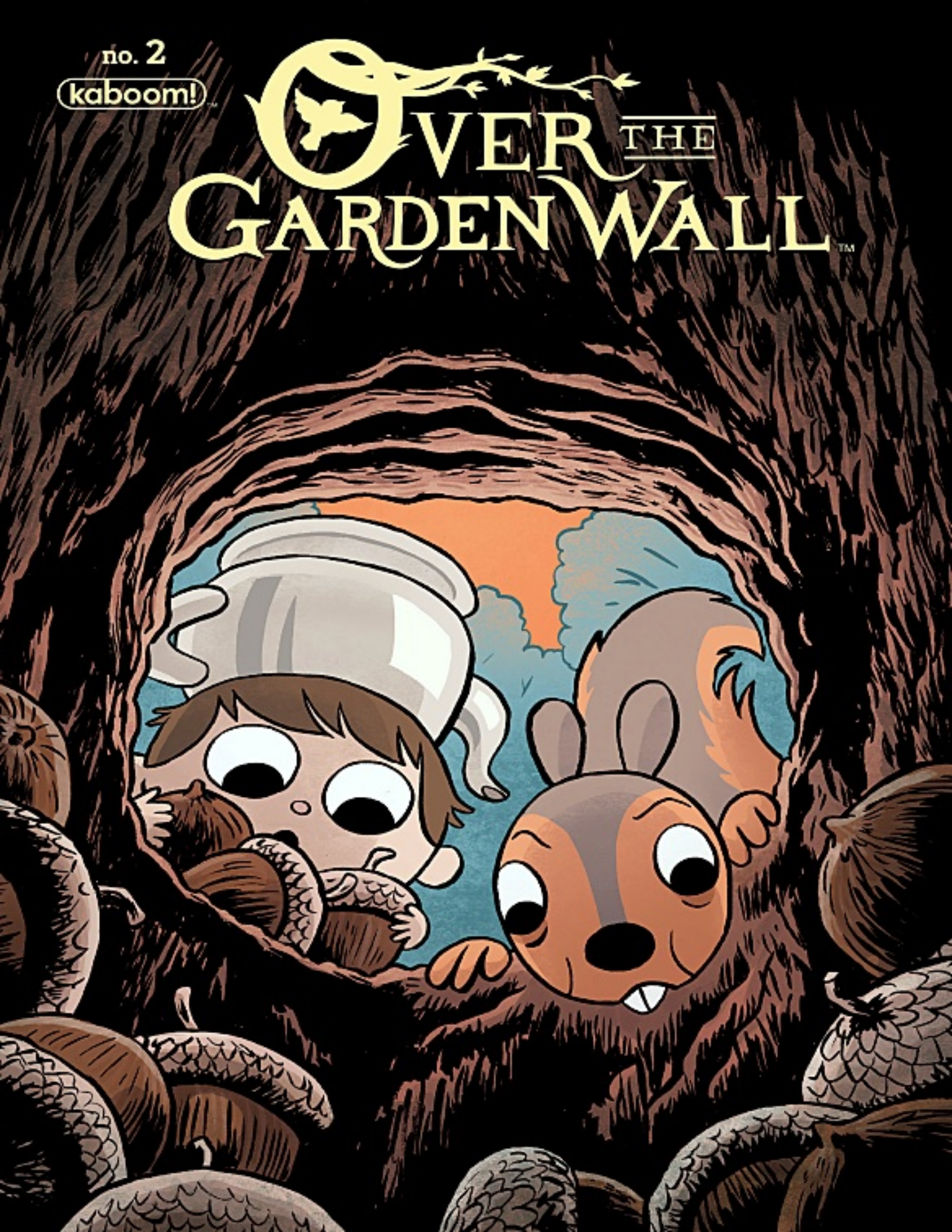
no. 2
kaboom!
OVER THE GARDEN WALL

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C'mon Robby!
We'll catch that frog or my name isn't Gregory and your name isn't Robber Raccoon!
Now where did he go?
ROROP!
OH! There you are! We made a wrong turn back there!
ROROP!

Now hold on a minute, Sheriff Funderburker!
You gotta tell us what this mission is all about!
RoROP!
Oh, top secret, eh?
Hmm... I better use my guessing abilities.
Oh! I know! You wanted me to help this squirrel with those acorns!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
Those are MY acorns!
What are we going to do with you?
We're not here to STEAL acorns! We're here to do community service!
Nevermind him. He's really harmless.
Now how can I help you Mr. Squirrel, sir?
That's MS. Squirrel to you, thank you!!
But yes PLEASE!! I need all the help I can get!

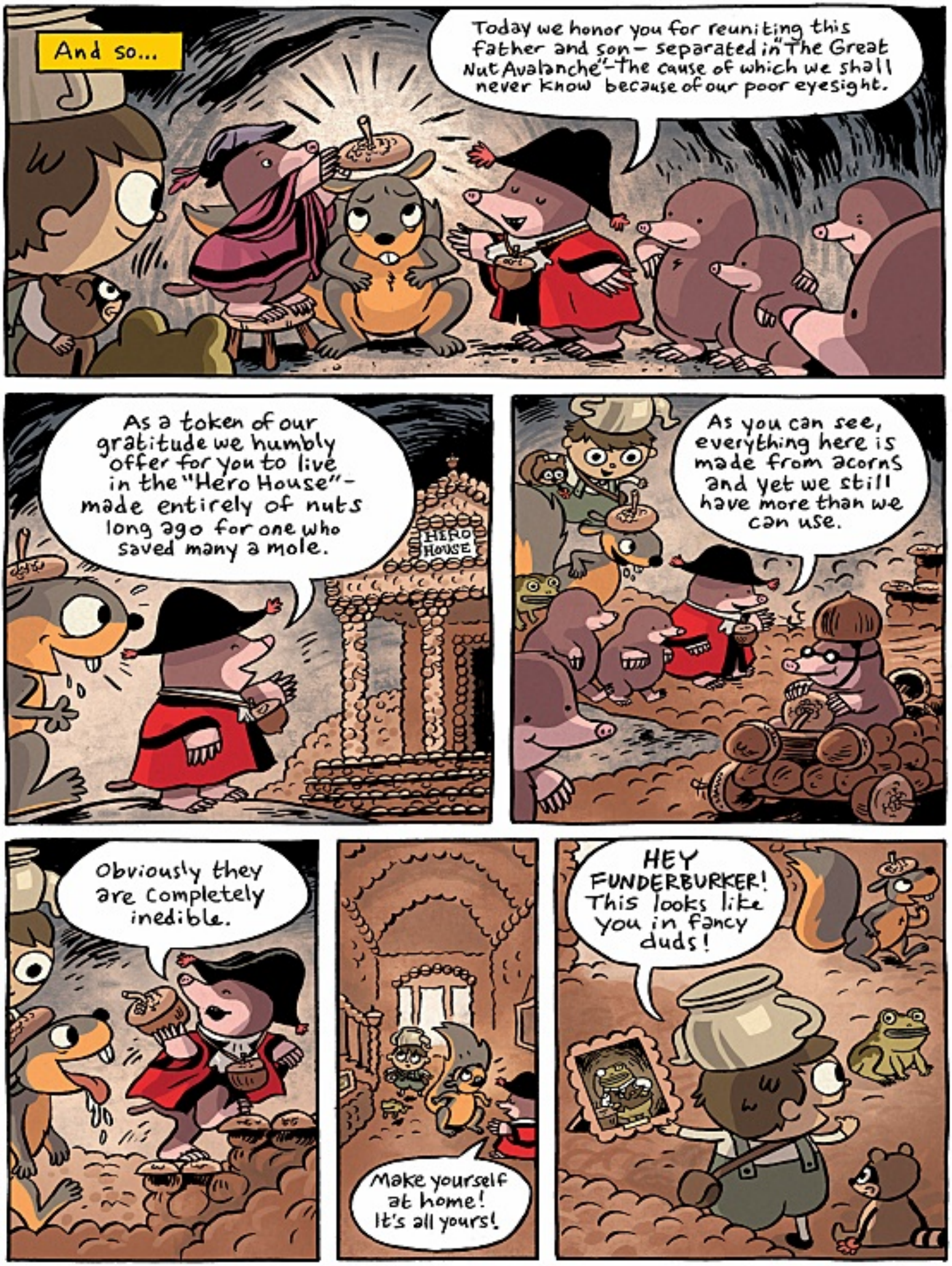
I have to fill up that hole in the tree before winter and I still haven't filled it!! I HAVEN'T FILLED IT YET!
If we all work together with "team work", I bet we can fill it in no time!
C'mon Jason! We need your help too!

This IS taking a while.
How long have you been putting acorns in this tree?
I've been doing this for FIVE YEARS!
Before that my mother spent her WHOLE LIFE doing it, and her mother before her, and so on for GENERATIONS!
Winter will come ANY MINUTE now, and it's STILL NOT FULL!!
I think the problem is that we don't have enough help!
-AHEM- Robber Raccoon, I'm looking at YOU.
You get in there and help stack the nuts!

Now we're moving!
MORE ACORNS!
HEY ROBBIE! How's it going in there?
Robber?
I'm going in after him.
MY ACORNS! ALL GONE!
CLINK

HA!
WAIT FOR US!
WOWEEE!
OH!
KLUNK
MY ACORNS!
YEAH!
KRAK
BAK
ALL OF THEM!
ALL MY ACORNS!

Meanwhile...
Yes, son, the Great Nut Pile is one of the mysteries of our world. Without it we—
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RROOARR!
Huh?
WEEEE!!
CRASH!
HAHAHA! SO MANY ACORNS HAHA!
Oh, there you are Robber!
OH DEAR! FATHER! FATHER IS LOST IN THE NUTS!
HEY! You're not an acorn!
GASP!
LOOK!


And so...
Today we honor you for reuniting this father and son – separated in "The Great Nut Avalanche" – the cause of which we shall never know because of our poor eyesight.
As a token of our gratitude we humbly offer for you to live in the "Hero House" – made entirely of nuts long ago for one who saved many a mole.
HERO HOUSE
As you can see, everything here is made from acorns and yet we still have more than we can use.
Obviously they are completely inedible.
Make yourself at home! It's all yours!
HEY FUNDERBURKER! This looks like you in fancy duds!

Ah, yes. That is the hero this house is named after.
A noble frog who saved the moles in a nut flood long ago.

ROROP!

This frog is WHO?
ROROP!

I see... uh-huh uh huh...
Well that explains why it's so important to find him!
ROROP!

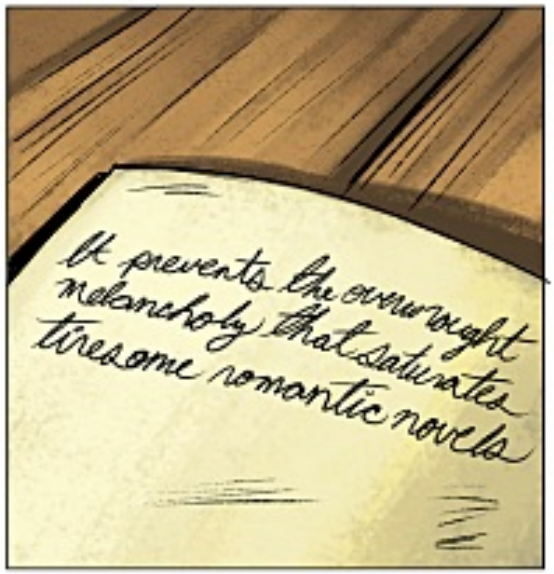
What's he saying?
Sorry. I can't discuss the details of the case — But tell me - where did you last see that frog?

That great frog left us many years ago. He was headed towards the woods over the mountain beyond the great river.

Finally a solid lead!
ROROP!
If it helps your quest please keep the portrait.
Really?! Thanks!
Good idea. We gotta keep it safe from sticky fingers!
Sorry to rush off, but this frog is on a mission after all!
Goodbye and thank you!
To be continued...

April II. To combat the ill effects of a wholly impractical degree of solitude, I've begun adhering to a routine.

It breaks the day up into satisfying segments.

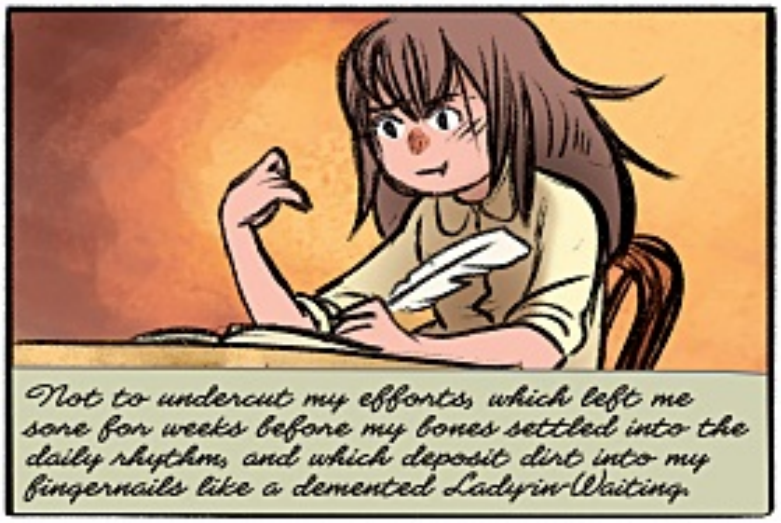

It prevents the overwrought melancholy that saturates tiresome romantic novels

Mother kept them in a wheelbarrow in the toolshed. They're horrid, each story an insult to its characters and creator. I just can't stop reading them.
Royal Affair
Petals in the Thorns

To Carthage, Burning
To Carthage, Burning
All the more reason for a regimen.

Mornings I do my best to allow the homestead to sustain itself. I say "allow" because I suspect that my presence isn't necessary.

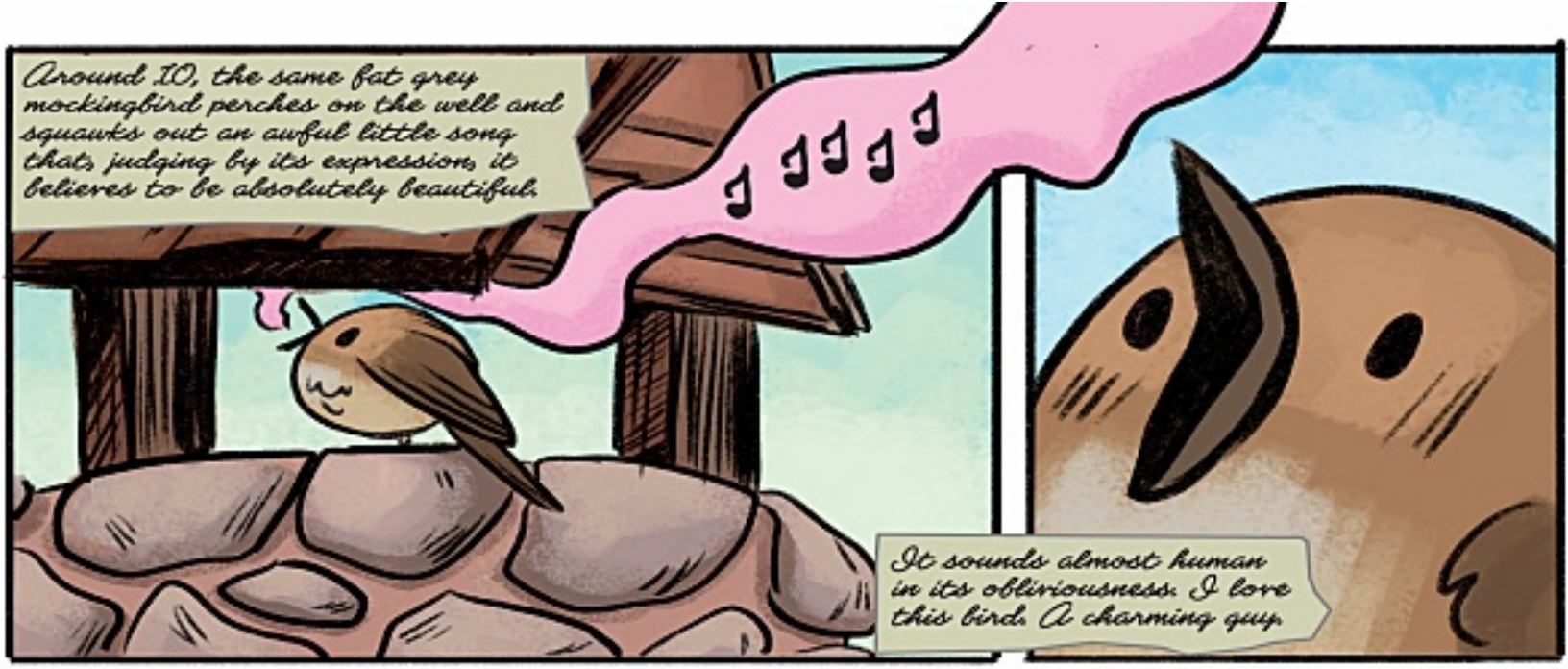
...it rains, the sun resurfaces, things grow.


Not to undercut my efforts, which left me sore for weeks before my bones settled into the daily rhythm, and which deposit dirt into my fingernails like a demented Ladyin-Waiting.

All I mean is that when I complete my tasks to the letter, it feels just like winding up a clock at daybreak that ticks steadily until the next day.

First I tend to the geese, then the goats.

I have a favorite one: a kid with a lame front leg that sometimes rests his head on my lap like a dog.


Around 10, the same fat grey mockingbird perches on the well and squawks out an awful little song that, judging by its expression, it believes to be absolutely beautiful.
It sounds almost human in its obliviousness. I love this bird. A charming guy.

He signals me to draw the water; what doesn't go to the garden becomes my tea.

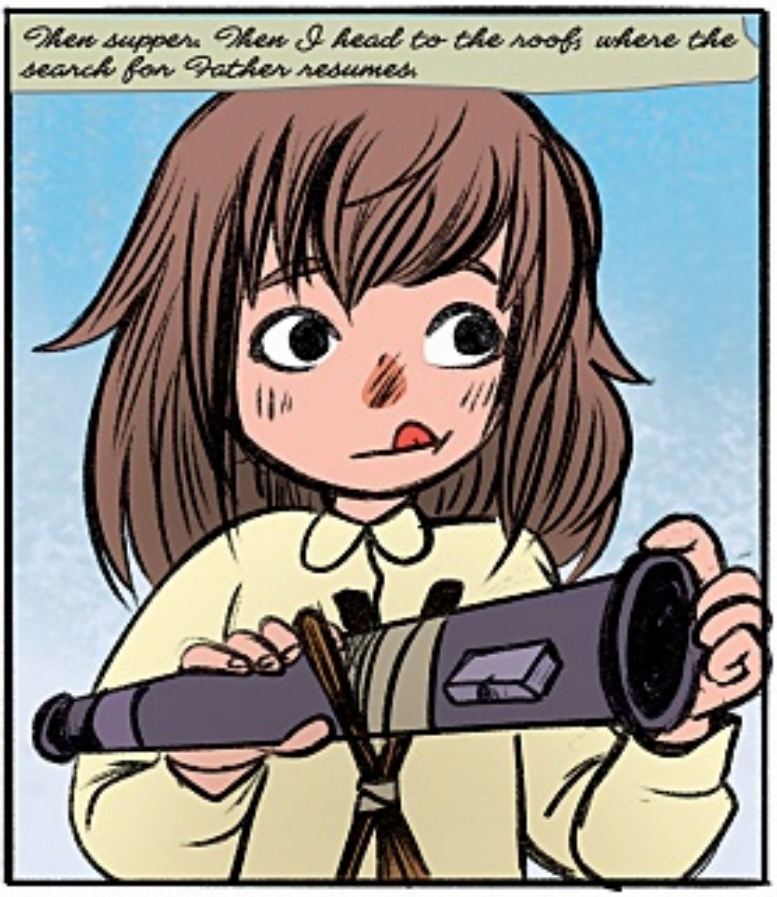
"Becomes my tea."

Oh dear. I worry, Journal, that I'm falling prey to the preciousness of novels, that I'm attempting to wring purpose out of these long, similar days by forcing all of the particulars into some frivolous poetic meter.

It's tricky to know how to paint all of this without self-congratulatory indulgences.
In any case: after tea (when some warmth chisels through the clouds) I collect supper and tackle any pressing chores.

Then I take a walk for as long as it takes to sweep the spiders from my brain. Not literally, Journal. I clear my head, that's all.

Then there's "lessons time" which is where I use Mother and Father's books to pretend that a proper education can be attained without instruction. I've improved in arithmetic and cartography. I wish I knew how to train my own voice.


Then supper. Then I head to the roof, where the search for Father resumes.

I've managed to cover a great deal of the woods. I scan as much as I can until sundown, always searching in concentric circles.

Once I've covered the entire map, I begin again. I've stopped counting the number of times I've spun that scope around, hoping to spot any sign of him.

I make notes as I go. I never lose hope. I've come to regard it as work, and am able to enjoy it in some heavy and terrible way.

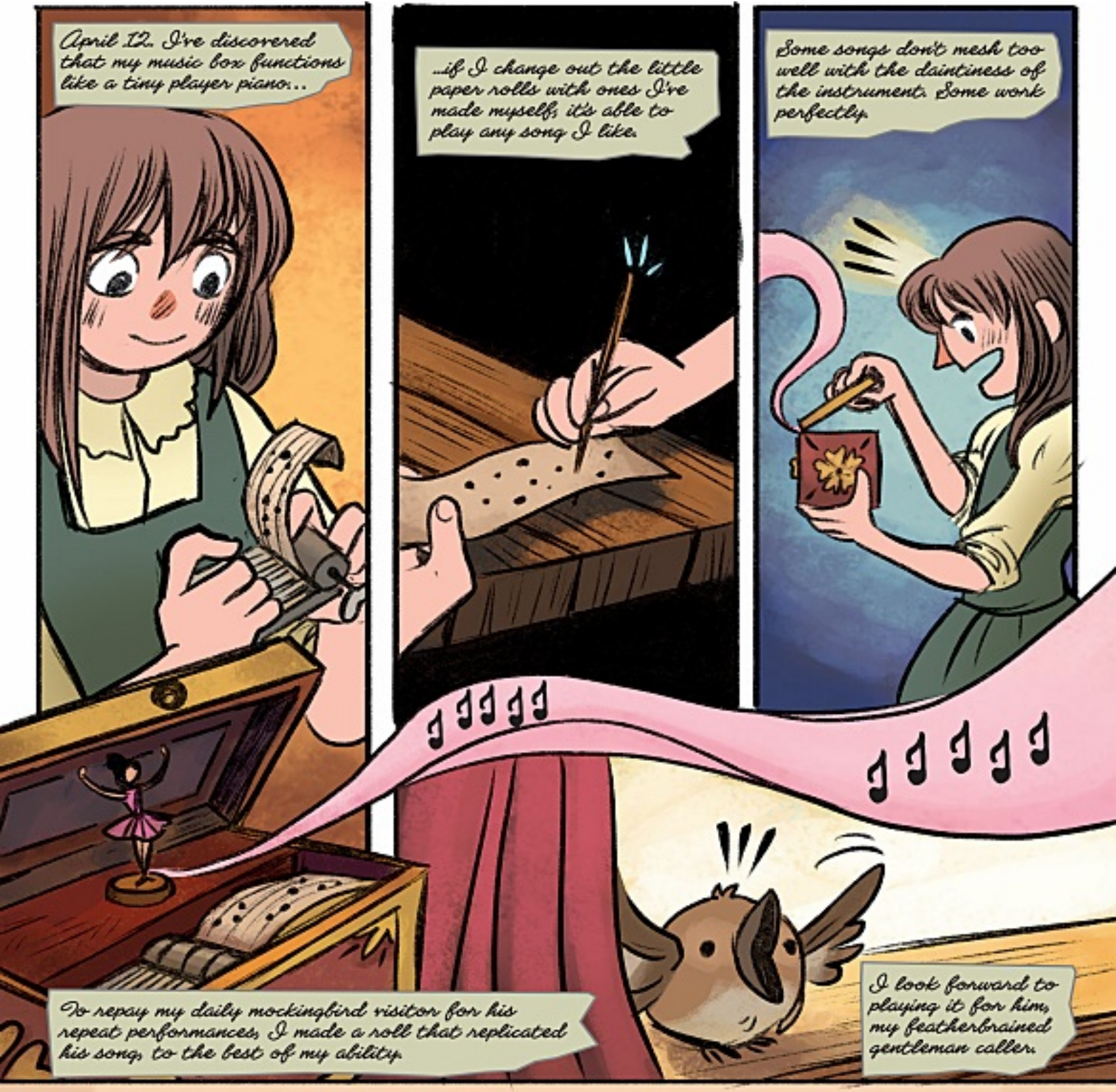
Then there's "evening time"— also the same every day, but in a way that's become very comforting.

Then, sleep.

Dreams of both of them returning without incident.

Dreams in which I speak with strangers.

Dreams of music, and of absurd fictional futures, no doubt fueled by those novels. Done with tea now. Time to walk. I'll return to this if I'm able to resolve its purpose.


April 12. I've discovered that my music box functions like a tiny player piano...
...if I change out the little paper rolls with ones I've made myself, it's able to play any song I like.
Some songs don't mesh too well with the daintiness of the instrument. Some work perfectly.
To repay my daily mockingbird visitor for his repeat performances, I made a roll that replicated his songs to the best of my ability.
I look forward to playing it for him, my featherbrained gentleman caller.

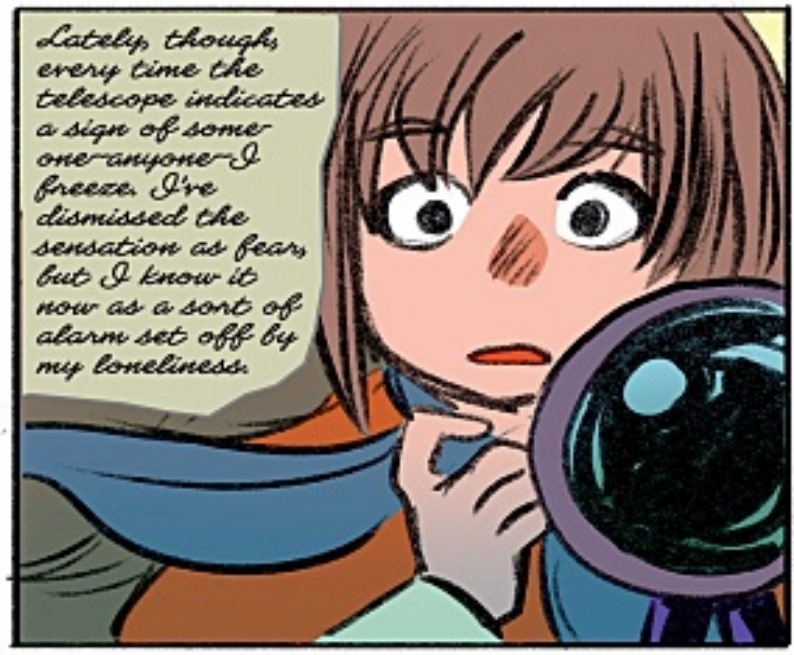
April 16

I intended to retire this journal habit for a while, but today was unusual and I want to record it in case it holds some insight I haven't yet realized.

All telescope observations passed without incident. Halfway through my rounds, though, I spotted...something.

Other times I've noticed some life stirring in the forest— plenty of creatures and the occasional wanderer—

—and once, some sort of celebration that I nearly investigated. But it would have been foolish. I've let caution dictate my choices, as Father would wish.

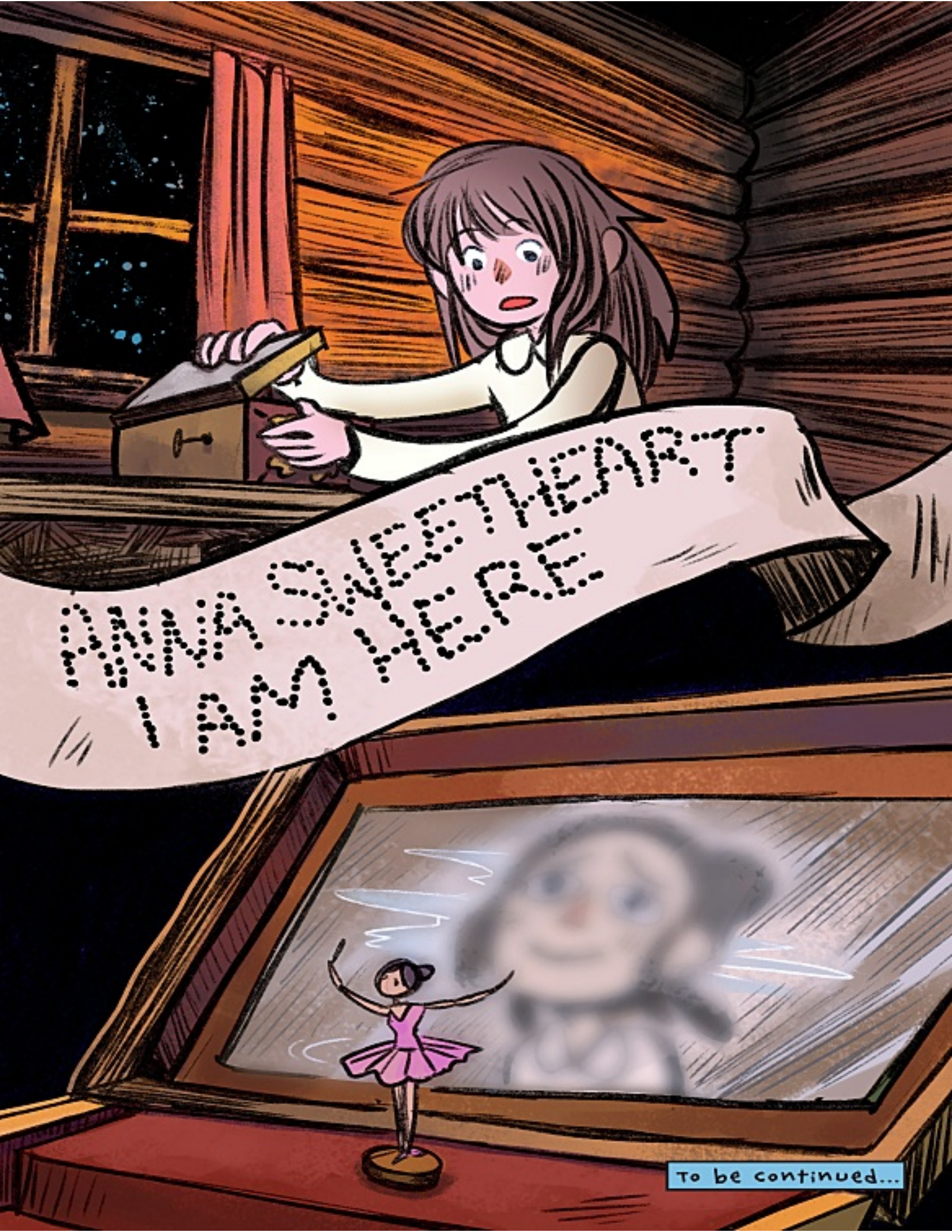

Lately, though, every time the telescope indicates a sign of some one—anyone—I freeze. I've dismissed the sensation as fear, but I know it now as a sort of alarm set off by my loneliness.

I miss Father, and Mother of course, but utter solitude has cast an additional pallor on my days.

I feel it deeply, a dearth that infiltrates the simplest moments with a disgusting sort of longing for even the smallest vestige of connection with another person. Today the feeling got the better of me.

From my scope, I spotted a young couple about to stroll into a part of the woods from which it would have been difficult to return.
I ran. In my haste to reach them, I tumbled and tripped, making quite a mess of myself—
When I reached them, I hid.
They were, of course, in no danger.
There was no dark patch in the woods.
Finally desperate for conversation, my eyes had tricked me.

I meant to retreat and head home, but I slid. (down a knoll, landing at their feet.)
I startled them. As they ran away, I heard their exchange.
A monster! Oh, darling, some terror has come for us!
No, no! On my honor, I shall protect you!
Funny.
I hope they found their way to the safety they never really left.
Walking back, I caught my reflection. I did look frightening.


ANNA SWEETHEART
I AM HERE
To be continued...

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WHAT COULD IT BE?

SOMEONE PLEASE ANSWER THIS FOR ME?

ESCAPE TO A WORLD OF WONDER!

WHAT IS IT?™

FROM NICOLE HOANG AND
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